

Falling Behind: The Decline of the Rights of Asylum Seekers in the UK and Its Impact on Their Day-to-day Lives

Sam Parker (Cardiff University)

In September 2015 photographs of the body of a young Syrian boy, who had drowned attempting to make the crossing by boat from Turkey to Greece, were published in newspapers around the world. These images led to a rise in public and political sympathy and support for refugees in many EU countries. However, such sympathy was short-lived, prompting some journalists to describe 2016 as 'the year the world stopped caring about refugees' (Safdar & Strickland 2016). In this paper, I begin by discussing changes in UK immigration and asylum policy over the past 30 years and highlighting the ways in which successive governments have introduced legislation that has created a 'hostile environment' designed to deter asylum seekers from entering the UK and to encourage failed asylum seekers to leave the UK. Such policies have restricted the civil and social rights of asylum seekers whilst simultaneously the UK government has focused upon policies for the integration of those granted refugee status only. This paper will report on the findings from interviews conducted with 19 refugees and asylum seekers living in Wales and the ways they spoke about their rights in the UK. Each of the interviewees had been living in the UK between one month and twelve years at the time of interview. The data are taken from a wider project focusing on refugee and asylum seeker integration in Wales. I show how policies introduced in recent years have led to restrictions on the day-to-day lives of asylum seekers in Wales and their ability to integrate, focusing particularly on the accommodation provided to asylum seekers via the current dispersal system and the barriers faced in accessing education.

Key words: Asylum seekers, immigration, integration, refugees

Introduction

Forced migrants crossing the Mediterranean in an attempt to reach Europe is not a new phenomenon (Pugh 2001). Within the category of 'forced migrants' Castles *et al.* (2014, p.221) make a clear distinction between the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee'. An asylum seeker is defined as someone who has crossed an international border in search of protection, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been decided (Castles *et al.* 2014, p.222), whereas refugees are those who have been recognized by a national government as meeting the requirements of the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Whilst 2015 saw the rise of the 'refugee crisis' (or 'migration crisis'), journalists such as Safdar & Strickland (2016) have claimed that 2016 was 'the year the world stopped caring about refugees'. The death of Aylan Kurdi on 3rd September 2015 and the publishing of photographs of his body, washed up on a beach in Turkey, following a failed attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea, were seen on newspaper front pages around the world in the days following his tragic death. These images led to a short-lived rise in public and political sympathy and support for forced migrants in some countries (Vis & Goriunova 2015, p.7). For example, shortly after publication of the photos, the UK Government made a commitment to resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees by 2020 whilst countries such as Germany went further and opened their borders to asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. However, 2016 also saw a fall in political support for forced migrants as many EU countries closed their borders and the EU negotiated a deal with Turkey in an attempt to restrict the number of forced migrants entering the EU via Greece. At the end

of September 2016, only 4,414 Syrians had been resettled in the UK (UK Parliament 2017) and the number of forced migrants who died in the Mediterranean Sea throughout 2016 increased to over 5,000 (Aljazeera 2016), the highest on record.

In this paper, I argue that despite a rise in public sympathy for forced migrants following the publication of the photographs of Aylan Kurdi in September 2015, the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK have been declining since the introduction of the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act. I begin by outlining the UK's asylum policy since 1993 and proceed to present evidence from interviews with asylum seekers currently living in the UK to illustrate the ways that these policies restrict their day-to-day lives in the UK.

The declining rights of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK: UK Asylum policy since 1993

In the early 1990s, asylum became a key political and policy issue in the UK following increases in the number of asylum applications during the 1980s and growing public concerns about levels of immigration (Schuster & Solomos 1999, p.51). Bloch & Schuster (2002, p.393) suggest that it was at this time that asylum became linked with welfare in the political and public arenas and, from 1993 onwards, led to the development of legislation that would create a 'hostile environment' for those seeking asylum in the UK. Forced migration scholars (Cholewinski 1998; Zetter *et al.* 2003; Crawley *et al.* 2011) argue that enforced destitution has been a planned outcome of public policy to disincentivize asylum seekers from coming to the UK whilst also incentivizing refused asylum seekers to leave the UK.

Before 1993 the UK had no specific asylum legislation, despite being a signatory of the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Indeed, it was not until the passing of the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act that this convention was made part of British law. Until this point the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s had done little to change the policy model of immigration that developed between 1962 and 1976 consisting of restrictive immigration laws and anti-discrimination laws. Indeed, prior to the 1993 Act, asylum seekers were able to claim cash benefits, had access to local authority housing and, in some cases, were permitted to work. From the introduction of the 1993 Act it was clear that reducing the numbers of asylum seekers was the goal, which would be achieved through restriction, primarily in access to the welfare state. The 1993 Act removed the right to permanent local authority housing for asylum seekers, during a time when social housing was becoming scarce (Dwyer & Brown 2008, p.205). The Act also capped benefit entitlement for asylum seekers at 90% of the standard rate received by British citizens. The 1996 Immigration and Asylum Act further restricted this benefit to 70% of the Income Support to which British citizens were entitled, in addition to transferring the responsibility for supporting asylum seekers to local authorities and their budgets. The changes made in the 1993 and 1996 Acts may explain the sudden fall in the number of asylum applications made in the UK in 1996, as prior to this applications had risen steadily each year from the 1980s onwards (Allsopp *et al.* 2014, p.15). Zetter and Pearl (2000, p.679) have suggested that this fall was in response to what they call the emergence of the 'restrictionist regime'. Yet despite this fall in 1996, asylum applications rose again between 1997 and 2002, suggesting that this may be reflective of global asylum trends and world events.

New Labour and a further decline in the rights of asylum seekers

Following Labour's return to government in 1997, the party went on to legislate on the issue of asylum on an unprecedented scale, no less than four times whilst in government. Prime Minister Tony Blair took personal charge of asylum issues in response to increasing numbers of asylum applications, hostile media reporting and growing concern amongst the public (Maughan 2010, p.8). Somerville (2007) suggests that Labour's impact on immigration policy can be thought of in two distinct phases: an initial reactive phase to deal with a backlog of asylum claims that had built up under the previous Conservative government; and a second, proactive phase in which further restriction and 'managed migration' topped the policy agenda.

Labour's vision for immigration was made clear in its 1998 White Paper *Fairer, Faster and Firmer: A modern approach to immigration and asylum*, in which they would:

create new support arrangements to ensure that asylum seekers are not left destitute, minimize the incentive to economic migration, remove access to Social Security benefits, minimize cash payments and reduce the burden on local authorities (Home Office 1998, p.5).

The resulting legislation was the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act, which excluded asylum seekers from all mainstream social security benefits through the creation of a separate support structure that those seeking asylum could access.

The creation of the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), charged with coordinating all accommodation and financial support for asylum seekers, had a number of significant impacts for asylum seekers in terms of access to welfare benefits and housing, but also on the longer-term prospects for integration and settlement within a community. This is because, under Section 95 of the Act, applicants are given two support options: subsistence only or accommodation and subsistence. For those choosing accommodation and subsistence, this accommodation requires dispersal to cluster areas within the UK on a 'no choice' basis. Zetter & Pearl (2000, p.683) suggest that the late 1990s were a time of 'housing crisis' in London and the South East and that dispersal was unofficially occurring before the introduction of the 1999 Act. London boroughs, struggling to find suitable accommodation for those they were supporting, had begun to seek arrangements with other local authorities who had suitable empty housing stock (Sales 2002). NASS created regional consortia in cluster areas (e.g. the North West, West Midlands etc.) involving both local authorities and other voluntary agencies (including refugee community groups (RCOs)), although Sales (2002, p.463) suggests that in practice NASS was effectively subcontracting its work to these consortia. There has been a wide range of research focusing on the impacts of asylum dispersal in the UK, particularly on the decision to disperse asylum seekers to areas of deprivation and social exclusion (Zetter & Pearl 2000), the lack of expertise and RCOs in some of those areas (Zetter *et al.* 2005) and on the, often poor quality, housing provided to them in these areas (Phillips 2006, Phillimore *et al.* 2008, Garvie 2001).

Under the 1999 Act financial support was provided to those awaiting a decision on their asylum application as a single payment, at approximately 70% of income support, that was given in the form of vouchers, rather than cash. These vouchers were only accepted at certain retailers, placing a restriction on not only where, but also what they were able to buy. Sales (2002, p.465) argues that

in a cash economy, the voucher system excludes asylum seekers from society. They are prevented from participating in normal everyday activities in which cash is taken for granted. Lack of cash also limits access to health care and other services, including legal advice, while the low level of the total package is insufficient to provide a healthy diet, particularly for children.

The voucher scheme, for those supported under Section 95, was scrapped in 2001 following complaints by charities supporting asylum seekers, and replaced by cash payments. However, asylum seekers currently receive only £36.95 per week, much less than the 70% of income support which asylum claimants received in 1999, as successive administrations have frozen increases in the support provided. For asylum seekers whose applications are subsequently refused, and who are unable to return to their home country, support is available under Section 4 of the 1999 Act. However, this is at a lower weekly rate of £35.39, provided on a payment card that functions in the same way as the previous voucher system, with no cash support being given. Destitution was further enforced under Section 55 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, which excluded asylum seekers from support if they had not made their claim 'as soon as reasonably practical' after arriving in the UK. In 2003 9,000 claims for support were refused due to this policy change, despite the government claiming that the policy would be implemented sensitively (Allsopp *et al.* 2014, p.16). The removal of the right to work under this Act further increased destitution amongst asylum seekers. However, in cases where an asylum seeker had been waiting over 12 months for a decision on their claim, they could apply to work, but only if they could undertake a job on the shortage occupation list.

The 2004 Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of New Claimants) Act and 2006 Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act introduced further restrictions on forced migrants' ability to integrate. However, these were measures that would impact upon them more greatly if they were successful in their asylum claim. For example, the 2006 Act limited the ability to plan for a long-term future in the UK with the introduction of five years' leave to remain granted to those recognized as refugees. Prior to the 2006 Act those recognized as refugees were often given indefinite leave to remain, with no requirement to re-apply or renew their status, although the 1951 Refugee Convention neither requires, nor obliges, states to offer permanent residence or citizenship (McDonald & Billings 2007).

More recently, in 2012, housing for asylum seekers was once again reviewed by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. At this time, the number of housing providers was streamlined and contracts to provide asylum housing were awarded to only three private contractors (G4S, Serco and Clearel) under the Home Office's new COMPASS contracts, thus removing local authorities' responsibilities for housing asylum seekers. A number of problems with the COMPASS contracts that have resulted in asylum seekers becoming the targets of racist abuse have been documented in the media. These include the use of wristbands in Cardiff and the painting red of asylum seekers' doors in Middlesbrough (Bates 2017).

Bloch & Schuster (2005, p.491) suggest that dispersal and enforced destitution are part of a three-pronged regime that also includes the threat of indefinite detention. Such policies have been a part of UK immigration legislation for many years and ensure that the 'hostile environment' for asylum seekers remains at a time during the 'refugee crisis' when asylum applications in the UK have been rising year-on-year for the past six years (Home Office 2016).

In the next section, I outline the methodology used in this study and then move on to present interview data that demonstrates some of the ways in which the restrictions identified in this policy review impact upon the day-to-day lives of asylum seekers living in Wales.

Methodology

The data in this paper come from a larger research project looking at the integration experiences of forced migrants in Wales, UK. Whilst above I have argued that a hostile policy environment exists for asylum seekers coming to the UK, it should also be noted that, at the same time, the UK and devolved governments have focused upon integration of forced migrants and have launched a number of strategies to achieve this. The UK government, who have not developed their refugee integration strategy since *Moving on Together* in 2009 (Home Office 2009), take the view that integration can only begin once refugee status has been granted and a long-term future in the UK can be planned. However, they do acknowledge that integration experiences can occur whilst asylum seekers are awaiting a decision on their claim (Home Office 2005). By contrast, the devolved governments in Wales and Scotland see integration as a process that begins on day one of arrival in the country and have continued to develop their refugee and asylum seeker integration strategies (Welsh Government 2016), and therefore devolved policies may have a greater focus on measures that support asylum seekers to integrate than in England. There is a lack of current research that looks at the integration experiences of forced migrants in a devolved, Welsh, context and this research aims to address that lacuna.

The data in this study consist of semi-structured interviews with 19 asylum seekers and refugees who had been living in Wales at the time of interview between one month and twelve years. The interviews used the 10 domains identified in Ager and Strang's (2004) 'Indicators of Integration framework' as a guide, and this was chosen because of its influence in recent UK and devolved government refugee integration strategies.

Participants were recruited to take part in this study with the help of refugee and asylum seeker support organizations in South Wales. Eleven of the participants were male and eight were female. They were from thirteen different countries of origin (Sudan, Iran, Syria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, Kenya, Chechnya, Nigeria, Iraq, Egypt and Uganda). All of the interviews were conducted in English and full consent was obtained from each participant before the interview began. Interviews lasted for between 25 and 70 minutes and were subsequently transcribed following a simplified version of conventions outlined by Jefferson (2004). In the extracts that follow pseudonyms are used for each of the participants in order to protect their identities. Each of the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006). One of the themes identified was restriction, which is the focus of the remainder of this paper.

Findings

'I can't do anything': The impact of current policies on asylum seekers living in Wales

Thus far, I have provided a brief overview of changes in asylum policy since 1993 and have suggested that such changes sought to create a 'hostile environment' that disincentivizes asylum seekers from coming to the UK and incentivizes refused asylum seekers to leave the UK. I now turn to look at how asylum seekers living in Wales describe their experiences of

living within such a 'hostile environment' and the impact that these restrictions have on their longer-term prospects for integration in Wales. I focus here on the accommodation provided to participants via the dispersal scheme and on their access to education to show how the policies described above continue to impact on those attempting to re-build their lives in Wales.

Asylum accommodation

Asylum seekers were first dispersed to Wales in 2001 when it became a dispersal area following the creation of NASS under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. Since then, asylum seekers dispersed to Wales, on a no-choice basis, have been housed in one of four Welsh towns or cities: Cardiff, Swansea, Newport and Wrexham. Whilst asylum and immigration remain reserved matters for the UK government, the Welsh government do have responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees under the devolved areas of education, health and social services. Although housing is a devolved matter, the UK Home Office currently contracts asylum accommodation to private contractors as part of its COMPASS contracts. As such, Clearsprings (Ready Homes) have been responsible for all asylum accommodation in Wales since 2012.

In the interviews for the current research, the lack of choice regarding accommodation was a topic that participants talked about as restrictive for them in a number of ways. In the first extract below, Layla, a refused asylum seeker and single-mother of two young children describes her experience of living in shared accommodation:

to me it's not really good for family because it's two families in the house [...] I have two girls and the other family has a boy (.) so maybe two parents in a four bedroom house (.) but we have our differences individual differences and it's not really (.) good enough for the children because you cannot (0.5) teach your children the way you want .hhh you can't give them- just you can't caution them the way you want because basically it's shared house [...] so they grow up doing different things (.) learning different things which you as a parent might not be happy with

In this extract, the main difficulty for Layla is sharing accommodation with another family. Shared accommodation is a feature of all asylum accommodation in Wales and, as a mother with two young children, Layla identifies two further issues which she has found problematic as a direct result of such living arrangements (over which she has no control). Firstly, she feels she is unable to educate and discipline her children at home in a way that she finds satisfactory, due to differences in parenting styles, lack of privacy and concern for what other parents may think of her. Secondly, she suggests that the influence that the other children may be having on her own children is not in accordance with her own values. Barbara, also a refused asylum seeker and single mother of one daughter, faced a similar situation and in this extract focuses upon the lack of choice she has over the situation:

I didn't have a choice you know ((coughs)) for now the situation is like that (.) so we just praying (.) when I have my papers I'm hope for God- they are nice yeah but .hhh you know (.) I have my daughter and need a house of my own you know heh (0.5) it's not easy to share all of the- they don't have no problem with me I don't have any problem with them .hhh but sometimes you know you want just your own and your family and want your space

In this extract, Barbara acknowledges her lack of choice and that it is not an easy situation. She appears to accept that this is a feature of the current asylum system and does not make specific complaints as Layla did in the previous extract. Instead, for Barbara, there is a focus on the need for a family to have their own space. Indeed, issues of space in relation to dispersed asylum accommodation came up in a number of the interviews, not just for families but also for single male asylum seekers, such as Awet:

it's it's not really good (.) because (1.0) .hhh (.) maybe I wanna stay erm bit longer in the lights on (.) but other guy wanna sleep and he say oh the light turn off the light and or maybe (.) he talk on the phone .hhh when I'm sleeping or I talk on the phone while he's sleeping (.) it's not- (0.5) convenient [...] (.) and also not like err convenient for to do things

Awet is also a refused asylum seeker and has lived in a number of different shared accommodations during the three years he has been in Wales. In his current accommodation, which he is talking about in the extract above, he describes the simple and practical difficulties of sharing a bedroom with a person that he did not choose to live with. He focuses on how this restricts his day-to-day living and gives the example of the ways in which sleep can be difficult in a shared bedroom. However, whilst Awet focused on simple practical difficulties within the accommodation, other interviewees described the experience of dispersal to an area where they were the only asylum seekers:

we don't know we don't er (0.5) we don't have good relations with our neighbours err (1.0) mm (1.0) we are different you know we are the only one who is from another place and most of them are (.) er (1.0) local people so (.) we are different in terms of colour in terms of identity even so it's difficult for us to have relations with our neighbours

For Emanuel, dispersal means living in an area where he feels different. Ager & Strang (2004), in their Indicators of Integration report, highlight the importance of social bridges with members of the host community as key to successful integration. However, Emanuel's account here suggests that dispersal to a predominantly British area has made integration very difficult for him. Later in his interview he talked of community groups as being the only place in which he is able to meet British people and that his house is only a place for asylum seekers, suggesting that dispersal may encourage separation between communities.

Access to education

Education is a matter that is devolved to the Welsh government. For asylum seekers, education policies in Wales are arguably more favourable than in England, where asylum seekers are only able to attend further education courses if they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for more than six months. This criterion does not apply in Wales and asylum seekers are able to access further education courses upon arrival in Wales. However, for those asylum seekers with young children there can be additional barriers to accessing education:

because the education is a bit difficult down here in Cardiff (.) basically they don't have childcare it's not approved for asylum seekers I think they cancelled it so it's a bit of struggle to get into the college [...] yeah I haven't done any education here

(.) though I've gone later to put down my name to see if (.) they ask me to come in if some of my asylum seekers friends that will look after each other's children if we have appointment if they can help me out so .hhh then I can give it a go [...] it's really really hard because most of the things I feel like doing like maybe some organizations or even my forum if they ask us to go somewhere (.) .hhh if they don't have funding much funding to pay for my childcare then I will be left out and other people without children or grown up children in school will be given the privilege to do it so it's really really difficult

Layla, as a mother of young children, is reliant on the provision of childcare in order for her to be able to access educational and social activities and feels that she is being left out of opportunities that might otherwise be open to her. As an asylum seeker receiving minimal financial support, Layla is further restricted in her ability to pay for childcare to allow her to take part in such activities. This suggests that while the Welsh government may have more favourable policies in relation to education for asylum seekers, if these policies do not include the provision of childcare there are likely to be many asylum seekers, particularly women, excluded from further education courses.

Asylum seekers wishing to access higher education courses in Wales face a similar policy environment to that of England and are classed as overseas students for fee and funding purposes. Several of the interviewees in the current study had the qualifications necessary to attend university but felt that the costs involved, when living on asylum support as little as £36.95 per week, and the inability to obtain financial support, put this out of their reach:

because if you have money (.) and if you have a proper status of a refugee then you can apply for- if I said for the university you can apply for a student loan for housing you can move the house wherever you want to go (.) and you can buy a car you can go

Here Bhaija, a 19-year-old asylum seeker who had started attending university in her home country before coming to the UK, focuses on her status as an asylum seeker which she constructs as the reason why she cannot pursue her goals. Indeed, she compares her situation with those granted refugee status to show the restriction which she faces as an asylum seeker. For Awet, who had successfully obtained a place at university, tuition fees were not the only concern he had:

I w- I was planning to go to the university (1.0) but as my er (2.0) current situation (1.0) it's::: not likely to happen [...] because of the fees and also (0.5) expense as well it's not just only for tuition I do need to eat or maybe sleep some (.) place or buy books or use (0.5) maybe materials such as (0.5) laptop or something [...] it didn't stop me to apply:: (0.5) but (.) w- heh heh (0.5) still if I have money it will not er stop me to study but since I I'm not allowed to work (0.5) I- so I can't get money to pay or (.) .hhh I can't get ask for errm finance so (0.5) indirectly it's stop me to study

In this account, there are a number of factors that combine to restrict Awet's ability to attend university. In addition to tuition fees he acknowledges that he would have difficulties paying the day-to-day expenses of students using only his asylum support money. He also links this back to a wider issue, of not being able to work as an asylum seeker, and suggests that if he was

able to work he would consider paying the tuition fees himself. In this sense he is acknowledging a multitude of ways in which the asylum system restricts his ability to continue his education. A more extreme account is given by Ghirmay:

nothing gonna get changed (1.0) you have got your visa you are- erm to be honest I am like a moving dead (.) I can't do nothing I can't do study I can't work (.) I can't do anything .hhh (.) nothing and it's quite suffering and just it's getting my nerves and it's nerve wracking hhh (.) and it's (.) very bad

Ghirmay had been living in Wales for over three years at the time of the interview and despite successfully completing further education courses that would allow him to attend university, his status as a refused asylum seeker prevented this, because of the costs involved and the inability to obtain student financial support. However, the restrictions which Ghirmay talks of here go beyond simply not being able to attend university. He also feels restricted through not being able to work and earn money and it is clear that he feels the asylum system limits him in such a way that he describes himself as being like 'a moving dead'.

Discussion

The findings presented in this paper support the existing consensus in current scholarship (Zetter *et al.* 2005, Bloch & Schuster, 2002), that UK asylum policy has led to a decline in the rights of asylum seekers since the early 1990s and that such a hostile policy environment continues to restrict the long-term ability of asylum seekers to integrate in the UK. Indeed, for Ghirmay in the extract above, such restriction had resulted in the extreme case of feeling that he 'can't do anything'.

The extracts presented in this paper show that restriction is a key feature of the lives of those currently waiting for a decision on their asylum claim. This is particularly the case for asylum seekers with children, who are subject to restrictions on their ability to parent and discipline their children because of the dispersal scheme, which often requires them to live in housing shared with other families. This is further compounded through difficulties in accessing services, particularly education, because of insufficient childcare opportunities and the costs involved in participation when they are forcibly destitute. Franz (2003) suggests that gender is the most important variable in explaining integration outcomes and other qualitative researchers have shown that female asylum seekers and refugees show poorer integration outcomes than men in relation to employment (Dumper 2002) and health (Phillimore 2011). Cheung & Phillimore's (2017) longitudinal analysis of the Survey of New Refugees (SNR) supports this finding as their results show that females granted refugee status, and who have dependent children, progress more slowly than men and typically take longer to develop social capital and access education, work or training. The findings of the current study, and of previous research, indicate that female asylum seekers may be falling behind in terms of integration outcomes and that integration policy, which has been absent from the Westminster governments since 2010, needs to consider ways in which the imbalance can be addressed.

The difficulties identified in housing by the female participants in this study point to a wider issue with asylum housing and the system of dispersal currently operated by the UK Home Office. The extracts shown indicate that restriction was not limited to female participants, nor to larger issues such as the ability to parent. Restriction also occurs, as a result

of shared asylum housing, at a much more routine level, and the example given by Awet demonstrated how the restrictions impacted upon his day-to-day activities such as reading or sleeping. However, the extract from Emanuel's interview points to a much larger problem with the current dispersal system, that is, the ability for asylum seekers to develop relationships with those in their local areas, particularly if, as in Emanuel's case, there are no other ethnic minorities living in the local area. The importance of being able to develop such bonding capital was identified by Ager & Strang (2004) as a key indicator of integration, but so too was bridging capital (relationships with the host community). The examples in this paper point to difficulties for asylum seekers in developing such bridging capital and raise questions about the dispersal of asylum seekers to areas of the country that may be hostile towards them. Indeed, in such situations, separation rather than integration may occur and the associated decline in social capital may mean that forced migrants find it more difficult to engage with services.

In this paper, I have also focused on the difficulties faced by asylum seekers in accessing higher education. Restrictions to asylum seekers' access to higher education were introduced following growing concerns that international students were abusing the asylum system, in order to avoid paying international fees and as a way of remaining in the UK following completion of their course. Such restrictions are part of the 'hostile environment' developed by the UK government over the past 20 years, at a time which has also seen the issue of immigration rise to become one of the key concerns of the British public (Duffy & Frere-Smith 2014). Education has been shown to be a key indicator of integration for refugees and asylum seekers (Ager & Strang 2004) and the extracts above show that this was a key issue for participants and one which they felt restricted them most acutely.

Conclusion

It is perhaps surprising given the rise in public sympathy for forced migrants that has followed the 'refugee crisis' and in particular the publishing of photos of Aylan Kurdi's body, that this has not translated into a more constructive policy response for those claiming asylum in the UK. The UK government's response to the 'crisis' has been to offer resettlement to 20,000 Syrian refugees. However, as this paper has shown, the rights of asylum seekers arriving spontaneously in the UK began declining long before the current 'crisis'. The extracts presented here demonstrate how asylum seekers living in Wales experience living in such a hostile policy environment and some of the ways in which restriction is a predominant feature of their day-to-day lives. Despite the Welsh government's attempts to integrate asylum seekers, it is clear that the impacts of the Westminster government's policies continue to have the greatest impact on the day-to-day lives of asylum seekers in Wales. Perhaps what is needed is a greater UK-wide focus on integration measures to ensure that asylum seekers are able to move on with their lives, without restriction and without feeling like the 'moving dead' as one of the participants in this study described their current situation.

Note on transcription conventions (Potter *et al.* 2011)

(.)	Short untimed pauses
(1.0)	A timed pause (in seconds)
[...]	Material deliberately omitted
heh heh	Voiced laughter
.hhh	in-breath
hhh	out-breath

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